

Washington, DC-Wednesday, Congressman Harry Teague sent a letter to the House Committee on the Budget urging the Committee to ensure timely funding and improved planning for veterans' health care by including the "advance appropriations" process in the FY10 Budget Resolution. The "advanced appropriations" process, which is already used for other programs, would provide funding one-year in advance of the regular appropriations process.

"Taking care of our Veterans is something that we should not compromise on during the budget process," said Congressman Harry Teague, a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. "Advanced funding for the VA is the only way to ensure sufficient, timely and predictable funding to get the men and women who have served our country the care and benefits they need."

Congressman Harry Teague authored the letter and worked with the chair of the Veterans Subcommittee on Health, Congressman Michael Michaud to secure the support of their colleagues, including the Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Congressman Bob Filner. Advanced Appropriations is supported by every major Veterans Service Organization including the Disabled American Veterans (DAV).

Full Text of the Letter Below:

March 24, 2009

The Honorable John M. Spratt Jr. The Honorable Paul Ryan
Chairman, House Committee on the Budget Ranking Member, Committee on the Budget
207 Cannon House Office Building B71, Cannon House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515-6065 Washington D.C. 20515-6065

Dear Chairman Spratt and Ranking Member Ryan:

As you are aware, on February 26, 2009, President Obama released his budget request for

fiscal year (FY) 2010. The budget request contains numerous encouraging items for our nation's veterans. The "top-line" funding request for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) was listed as \$52.5 million - an increase of approximately 10 percent over FY 2009 funding levels. The Administration maintains that this request will result in increased funding for the VA by \$25 billion above baseline over the next five years. The budget request will also expand eligibility for veterans' health care to over 500,000 veterans by 2013.

However, a much needed reform in the funding process for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) was not included in the President's "top-line" budget request, namely a mechanism for providing timely and predictable resources to the VA. One such mechanism, advanced appropriations, would provide VA with an assured source of funding to meet the growing demand for services and adequately maintain operational facilities. We urge you to support advance appropriations for veterans' medical care in the FY 2010 Budget Resolution.

Last year, our government was able to enact an on-time budget for VA for the first time in over ten years. Unfortunately, this "timely" budget was approved on September 30, 2008, just one day prior to the start of the next fiscal year. As a direct provider of services, VA operations benefit greatly from advance notice regarding resource allocation. Last-minute funding threatens the quality of care, even when budgets are approved on-time. Late budgets further hinder the ability to recruit well-trained medical professionals, maintain operational facilities, and acquire new equipment. During testimony before the Senate Veteran's Affairs Committee on July 27, 2007, former VA medical center directors stated that most VA budget cycles began via a continuing resolution. As a result, decisions were made on the basis of cost rather than on the basis of the most qualitative treatment.

Providing VA with advanced appropriations will alleviate many budgeting burdens, ultimately resulting in improved quality of care for veterans and better use of taxpayer dollars. Many have compared this measure to a family budget - a household needs to know its income in advance in order to adequately plan its expenses.

Advance appropriations have already been utilized to meet program recipient funding cycles and promote more efficient operations. Programs that currently have advance appropriations include Head Start, Section 8 housing assistance, Job Corps, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. We must provide the same consideration to the agency dedicated to caring for our nation's most honored heroes.

In order to provide advance appropriations to VA health care, the Budget Committee must remove the procedural impediment to advance appropriations as delineated in Section 302 of the FY 2009 Budget Resolution. In order to do so, we ask that the Budget Committee include language to the FY2010 Budget Resolution adding the medical care accounts of the VA - Medical Services, Medical Support and Compliance, and Medical Facilities - to the list of programs exempt from the point of order.

We look forward to working with you and the Budget Committee to include advance appropriations for VA health care in the FY 2010 Budget, and by doing so honoring our nation's commitment to the men and women who kept, keep, and will keep this country safe.

Sincerely,

Harry Teague
Member of Congress

Michael Michaud
Member of Congress

Bob Filner
Member of Congress

Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin
Member of Congress

John Hall
Member of Congress

James Oberstar
Member of Congress

Ciro D. Rodriguez
Member of Congress

Ann Kirkpatrick
Member of Congress

Glenn Nye
Member of Congress

Tom Perriello
Member of Congress

Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress

Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

Peter Welch
Member of Congress

Phil Hare
Member of Congress

Raul M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Martin Heinrich
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Al Green

Member of Congress

Ben Ray Lujan
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Madeleine Bordallo
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Marcia Fudge
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Eric J. Massa
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Joe Sestak
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Jared Polis
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Leonard Boswell
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Mike Ross
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Don Young
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Luis V. Gutiérrez
Member of Congress

Betty Sutton
Member of Congress

Gabrielle Giffords
Member of Congress

Bart Gordon
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Bill Pascrell
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree
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Steve Cohen
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Mark Schauer
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Maurice Hinchey
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Carol Shea-Porter
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Rubén Hinojosa
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